

THE DEATH OF PRESIDENT LINCOLN.

A MEMORIAL DISCOURSE,

DELIVERED IN THE

Berean Baptist Church, West Philadelphia.

ON SUNDAY, APRIL 16th, 1865,

BY THE PASTOR,

REV. JAMES COOPER.

PHILADELPHIA:

JAS. B. RODGERS, PRINTER, 52 AND 54 NORTH SIXTH STREET.

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PHILADELPHIA, April 19th, 1865.

REV. JAMES COOPER:

Respected Sir—Having listened with great satisfaction to your discourse, on last Sabbath morning, the 16th inst., on the assassination of our lamented President, Abraham Lincoln you would confer a great favor by loaning us the manuscript for publication.

Respectfully your friends,

JOHN P. LEVY,	J. A. GENDELL,
HENRY H. ENGLISH,	J. C. PAYNTER,
SAMUEL APPLETON,	C. C. ROBERTS,
J. H. JOHNSON,	W. ELWOOD ROWAN,
WM. P. DE SANNO,	EDWARD H. PUGH,
WM. RUSSELL,	S. T. ALTEMUS.

PHILADELPHIA, April 24th, 1865.

To JOHN P. LEVY, HENRY H. ENGLISH, and others.


Gentlemen—Your note of the 19th inst., in which you speak so kindly of the discourse delivered on the Sabbath morning preceding, has been received.

I cheerfully submit the manuscript, as you desire, for publication.

With affectionate esteem,

Yours very truly,

JAMES COOPER.



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A MEMORIAL DISCOURSE.

2 SAMUEL i. 19—"The beauty of Israel is slain upon thy high places:
how are the mighty fallen!"

THE history of the civil war which for four years has convulsed this land has been remarkable for the frequent and sudden alternations of feeling in the public mind. From deep despondency to highest exultation, from an all-pervading gloom to an all-enveloping brightness of public sentiment; from darkness to light and from light to darkness, from the sorrow of defeat to the joy of victory, and from the joy of victory to the sorrow of defeat, the transitions have been rapid and abrupt.

The profound gloom and misgiving of the people during the never to be forgotten months which preceded the bombardment and fall of Fort Sumter, were suddenly dispelled by that attempt of frenzied men to dishonor the symbol of American nationality, and the spectacle was presented to the world of twenty millions of people aroused to the highest degree of enthu-

siasm, and impelled by the spirit of a sublime patriotism to heroic deeds for its vindication.

From a state of self-reliant and boastful security we were plunged at once into an abyss of horror and of grief by the disastrous results of the first great conflict which raged almost in sight of the nation's capitol. No less sudden was the recovery from the disappointment of defeat to a more intelligent, and firmer resolution to make still greater sacrifices for the Republic.

The rapidity with which events have changed, is singularly illustrated by the diverse effects which have been produced in the minds of foreigners. Separated from us by the great sea, they have been removed from the excitements and confusions in which we have daily lived, and they have viewed the events transpiring here in the aggregate, and not as we have, in many and contradictory particulars. The tidings of one week, which have given grief to our friends and joy to our enemies abroad, have been followed in the succeeding week by other tidings, which have given joy to friends and grief to enemies.

The ebb and flow of the tides which have laved foreign shores, have been scarcely more regular in their movements than the ebb and flow—the fall and rise of public feeling in foreign lands consequent upon the almost periodical changes of events with us.

But remarkable as the alternation of events—of good and evil—fluctuating as the feelings of the peo-

ple have been during the past four years, none bear any comparison in suddenness and fearfulness, and in the revulsion of feeling experienced, with what has transpired during the past few hours.

When the sun, which all the day long had poured forth its wealth of light and glory over the land, and bathed with its fiery flood the starry banner waving in every breeze, went down on Friday night, its last lingering beams rested upon a joyous people. All hearts were filled with gladness, and every tongue was vocal with praise. The morning dawned—the nation was in tears, and draping itself in the habiliments of mourning. Suddenly, as if the sun at noon-day were eclipsed, a horror of great darkness fell upon us. The idol of our hearts—the strong staff of our confiding trust—the Patriot—the Statesman of tried worth—our honored Chief Magistrate was no more.

The glory of American Israel is slain upon our high places: how is the mighty fallen!

From whatever point of view we contemplate this event—whether we regard the joyous and congratulatory scenes from the midst of which he was violently removed, or regard the time and the manner of his death—it is a most afflictive dispensation. That in the hour of signal triumph to our arms—on the very day, when, with commemorative services, the national colors were again unfurled over the same historic place where four years before they had been

lowered—that at the close of the first great stage of the national struggle—at a time when the future was bright with signs of final and complete success, and presaged the return of peace and prosperity, that at such a time the President should die, is profoundly mysterious. A mournful calamity, it would have proved, if wasted by disease, or from fearful injuries, his noble heart had ceased to beat, and his manly form had sunk to rest amid the tears of a stricken family, and of a bereaved nation, but that he should die by an assassin's hand, by a felon's hate, is overwhelmingly appalling. We are transfixed with horror.

For the first time in the annals of our country, the awful crime has been committed of the assassination of our highest ruler. Other lands have witnessed such crimes. Ancient and modern history afford many instances—but the pages of American history have never been darkened, until now, with the record of so black a crime.

It is difficult to find in the past a parallel to this atrocious deed. One instance, having some resemblance to the present, we discover in the closing quarter of the sixteenth century. On the 10th of July, 1584, William the Silent, Chief Magistrate of the United Netherlands, perished by the pistol of an assassin. The territory over which his authority was acknowledged was small contrasted with that over which the authority of President Lincoln was recog-

nized—it was not larger, in fact, than the States of Delaware and Maryland combined, and contained a population of only one million and a half of people; and yet, in the momentous interests, both political and religious, which were at stake in the war then raging, in the important stage of his country's struggle, at which William the Silent was murdered, and especially in the traits of character of the Washington of the sixteenth century, as he has been called, there is much that would afford instructive comparison. But time will not allow, and the occasion does not require that the resemblances should be traced.

I am not qualified to give my hearers an elaborate delineation of the great statesman whose death we deplore. It is no easy task to portray with just discrimination his character. Abraham Lincoln was, in many respects, a remarkable man. Of humble birth, subjected to privations, and accustomed to severe toil from early youth, yet by the inherent force of his character, and by faithful improvement of meagre advantages, he rose by degrees to the high place of honor and of influence which he so ably filled at the time of his death.

His life adds another to the many examples, confirming the adage that great men are born in adversity.

He was eminently a man of the people. His sympathies were enlisted always on their behalf; their

elevation, their success, and their happiness were greatly desired by him, and in his own character and life he illustrated the essential dignity of man apart from the circumstances of birth or of wealth, independently of all conventional distinctions.

Self-educated, his mind was disciplined by severe study, and was enriched in no small degree with general as well as professional literature. He was distinguished for sound common sense, and for the practical cast of his mind. In his writings and his addresses he was plain, direct and simple; there was no attempt at eloquence, and no striving after an immediate effect, but his language was always clear and vigorous. His illustrations, not unfrequently derived from the most humble and familiar sources, were selected, not to adorn, but to give point to his speech, and because of their fitness to make his meaning clear to the great mass of men.

He was a large-hearted man, of tender, kind and affectionate spirit; the warmest impulses of his heart were toward the humble and the neglected—toward the obscure and the helpless. The sick and wounded soldiers—the widows and the fatherless, made such by the ravages of war—and the poor freedmen found in him a compassionate friend. The range of his sympathies was almost boundless, for the unintelligent as well as the intelligent creation shared in their exercise. If ever there was a man to whom the sentiment of

Wordsworth would apply, and from whose lips the words of the poet would most naturally fall, that man was ABRAHAM LINCOLN:—

“Thanks to the human heart,
Thanks to its tenderness, its joys and fears,
To me the meanest flower that blows can give
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.”

His moral convictions were deep and powerful—he earnestly sought to discern what was right, and was firm and unyielding in what he believed to be his duty. Honesty, uprightness, and singleness of purpose were pre-eminent elements of his character. Armed with these, he was able to meet, and to baffle the intrigue, subtle policy, and cunning diplomacy of the arch traitor, through whose wicked counsels and determined will the rebellion has so long resisted the armies of the Republic.

The existence in him of a religious spirit, the exercise of a calm religious trust in the most critical periods of the war, and a devout recognition of God in the results which have been secured; these traits of his character, and their frequent expression, which have been so well known to us, have, at length, been recognized by eminent writers abroad.

The London Spectator, in an article on President Lincoln, referring to Macaulay's celebrated comparison of Washington to John Hampden, says: “If that high eulogium was fully earned, as it was, by the first great

President of the United States, we doubt if it has not been as well earned by the Illinois peasant proprietor and village lawyer, whom, by some divine inspiration or providence, the Republican caucus of 1860 substituted for their nominee for the President's chair." It adds, speaking of his Inaugural of the 4th of March, that it contains "a grasp of principle, a dignity of manner, and a solemnity of purpose, which would have been unworthy of neither Hampden nor of Cromwell, while his gentleness and generosity of feeling toward his foes was almost greater than we should expect from either of them."

Suffer me in this connection to refresh your memories with the concluding paragraphs of his second Inaugural. How solemn do the words appear now, that their author is no more!

"Fondly do we hope, fervently do we pray, that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled by the bondman's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said, that 'the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.'

"With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind

up the nation's wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow and his orphans; to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and a lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations."

I have no desire to indulge in indiscriminate eulogy of PRESIDENT LINCOLN. That he had faults I do not deny, but some of those traits of his character which were deemed to be, and were proclaimed to be faults, were not really such.

His jocoseness—his readiness to draw from a seemingly inexhaustible fund of anecdote—were not evidences of indifference to the solemn interests of the country, but were often the necessary rebound of his elastic spirit long overborne by the cares and responsibilities of his office. The very same peculiarity distinguished the illustrious soldier and statesman to whom I have already referred. Of ABRAHAM LINCOLN this may be justly said—"He was a man, take him for all in all, we shall not look upon his like again."

From this brief review of his character, from this imperfect tribute to his worth, I turn to consider some of the thoughts which our national bereavement suggests.

I. God, in his infinite mercy, seems to have prepared us in an especial manner to bear this terrible stroke of affliction. I call to your remembrance a remark which was made from this place on last Sunday night. Referring to the outbursts of jubilant emotions which

followed the announcement of the storming, by our gallant men, of the enemy's works in front of Petersburg, of the utter rout of the rebels, and the capture of their boasted impregnable capital; referring to the extraordinary manifestations of feelings which these stirring events called forth—the copious tears, the friendly greetings of strangers, the passionate embrace of friends, and the glorious songs of praise to Almighty God, which ascended from the thronged streets, from the centres of business and of wealth, and from the temples of devotion—I suggested that the relief afforded by these signal successes, to feelings which had long been pent up in the breasts of the people, feelings which they had not dared to give freest expression to before, would prove to be invigorating, filling the lungs with moral oxygen of which they had long been deprived, and imparting moral tone and health to mind and body, and that we should be prepared to bear with greater firmness whatever of disappointment or of trial might await us in future. In this opportunity for fullest joy, God was granting us release from the intense strain upon our nerves, and from the severe pressure to which our spirits had been subjected through years of fearful and bloody war. Who would have thought that in one short week we should be prostrated by the stroke of so grievous an affliction, and be overwhelmed by the sorrow of so dire a calamity?

But can we not discern the evidence of the mercy of God, in withholding this most bitter cup of grief until success had awakened joy in our breasts, in shielding us from this mighty blow until strength had been imparted to bear it, in not permitting the dense clouds and darkness to gather around us until we had realized that the end was not far off, and had caught, through opening vistas, glimpses of the glory that was soon to overspread the land? Had this calamity befallen us at any previous stage of the war, it might have paralyzed, where now it has only stunned us; it might have crushed, where now it has only shocked us; and instead of the agony which now finds relief in tears, there might have been a tearless agony, such as consumes the strength with inward fever and oftentimes ends in despair.

So far as human wisdom merely may judge, if the murder of our beloved President had been consummated on the eighth of November, or the fourth of March last, it would have utterly confounded us: universal distrust would have prevailed, and the arm of authority paralyzed by the shock, treason would have lifted up its frightful head into the light, and would have wrought with impunity its horrid deeds of fire and blood. Our condition as a nation might have been that which the United Netherlands in similar circumstances was represented to be—"a dismasted hulk reeling through the tempest." But God inter-

posed his mighty arm, and hath verified, in our national experience, that promise which believers have found true in their personal experiences—"As thy days, so shall thy strength be."

II. God teaches us by this solemn providence, the sacredness of the Chief Magistracy of the Republic.

That civil government is of God, an ordinance of divine appointment, needs no labored argument to prove. Whatever of doubt or of misconception, on this point, may have existed in the minds of the people in former years, the events of the past four years must have completely removed.

The exigencies of the nation, the perils which have environed it, and the sacrifices of treasure and of blood that have been called for, have compelled men to examine anew, and to decide the question for themselves. The desperate assaults of treason against the unity of the Republic, the deadly blows which have been directed at its foundation principles, and the tremendous shock which its institutions have suffered—these have deepened the conviction, not only that civil government is an ordinance of God, but also that that form of government which here exists, is in harmony with the will of God, and is to be upheld and its authority vindicated at whatever sacrifice of money or of men. The conviction is thoroughly ingrained in the minds of the American people, that this Government, as a sacred legacy bequeathed to them by

their fathers, and as bearing the signature of the Divine approbation, is to be preserved unimpaired in its integrity, and to be defended to the last extremity.

But are we as intelligently persuaded that the administrators of the functions of the Government are "ministers of God?"—that, in the same sense in which civil government is an ordinance of God, the "powers that be" are ordained of God? Do we manifest that reverence to the magistrate that we do of obedience to the authority of the laws? Surely, the highest officer of a free people, the Chief Magistrate of a powerful nation, ought to be invested with a dignity and an honor in the minds of the people. How profoundly impressed with the sacredness of the office, and of the person of a great ruler David felt, his relation to Saul, king of Israel, and his indignation against his supposed murderer, plainly disclose. "How wast thou not afraid to stretch forth thy hand to destroy the Lord's anointed?" As though the simple knowledge that he had been set apart to his office by the Lord, should have guarded Saul from the hand of violence.

The absence of a becoming respect to our highest officers, has been painfully felt by intelligent observers. We have made the securing of stations which they fill the rewards of faithful services to party, and have selected men without much concern as to their capacity or fitness for high positions. We have recognized the authority of our rulers, but we have not enter-

tained towards them that deep regard which their exalted position and representative character justly entitled them. We have not thrown around them any guards of protection, deeming such precautions as not only unnecessary, but as derogatory to the intelligence and virtue of the people, and as a satire upon the practical workings of a Republican government.

We have been unrestrained in our criticisms of the opinions and measures of our public men. In the heat of party strife, we have heaped upon them obloquy and reproach. We have not spared the highest in authority from ridicule and scorn. Our honored President, now sleeping in death, had his full share of harsh criticism and unmerited abuse. Within the past few weeks, there have not been wanting evidences of divisions among his supposed friends, and preparations making to arrest whatever was opposed to their ideas concerning the policies which should be pursued in the settlement of the extraordinary difficulties of the passing time.

It is not sufficiently borne in mind that the office of Chief Magistrate is one of vast responsibility, and that he who would administer it wisely, must look at every aspect of grave questions, the decisions of which may influence the destinies of the nation for weal or woe for succeeding generations.

But, as if to recall to our memories a forgotten truth—as if to impress anew, with indelible lines,

upon our minds the sacredness, the inviolable dignity which should be associated with the Chief Magistracy of the Republic, God has summoned us to mourn over the prostrate form of our honored Chief, slain by a murderer's hand. If a noble and generous nature—if private virtues—if beneficial public acts could give security from an assassin's power, then Abraham Lincoln would have lived to-day. But the worth of his personal character, his sense of personal safety, the security which exalted official station is supposed to impart, were all in vain.

The manner of his death suggests lessons which should not be unheeded by the nation. Precautionary measures of some sort must be devised to insure the personal safety of the Chief Executive of the United States. In view of the important interests placed in his hands, and of the disastrous results which might ensue from the violent removal of the nation's head, this is demanded. We need to remember, also, the danger there is in the unrestrained indulgence of a spirit of criticism in regard to the motives and actions of our rulers—of weakening the influence of their public character, and secretly undermining their authority. Liberty is not license of speech; the proper exercise of criticism in a free government, does not include "speaking evil of dignities."

He who has been so unexpectedly called to this great office, is worthy of confidence and support. His

past life, his unswerving loyalty and his self-sacrificing patriotism are pledges that he will not disappoint the just expectations of the American people. God grant him length of days and a prosperous administration.

III. In this deed of crime, the ultimate test has been applied to the strength and stability of this Government.

Our rejoicings in one respect have been premature. We have been too hasty in the conclusions we have drawn from the recent splendid victories of our armies. We flattered ourselves that the nation was wholly saved, that the highest test had been applied to our form of government. We rested in the conviction that treason had exhausted its power for evil, that the Temple of Liberty had survived the assaults of rebel foes, and that henceforth the principles of self-government would every where prevail, and free institutions founded upon and sustained by the intelligent will of the people, would every where arise. We have not concealed our joy over the failure of the predictions and the disappointment of the hopes of the enemies of this Government in foreign lands. We have not failed to improve the opportunity to dwell with complacency upon this aspect of affairs, and our words of exultation are being borne across the waters to-day—"Aha, prophets of evil! Where now are your vaticinations of ruin? Falsifiers of the spirit, purpose and power of the people, where now are your confident

predictions of national weakness and of defeat? Li-
bellers of a free people, struggling for the supremacy
of law, for the triumph of order and liberty, where
now are your assurances of the disintegration and
overthrow of the Republic? Baseless as the fabric
of a vision, they leave no trace behind." In the con-
sciousness of our strength, we have proclaimed that
the thrones of Europe would totter to their fall, and
that the privileges of aristocracies would be swept
away by the tempests of wrath of a long-suffering
people, aroused to put forth their invincible power,
and encouraged by the glorious achievements which
we have wrought, and in which we have given proof
of the strength and stability of a Republican form of
government.

But in the midst of our gratulations—in the hour
of greatest confidence, we have been brought to face,
without the slightest note of warning, an unthought-
of peril. An event which would lead in other coun-
tries to revolutions or to changes of a most radical
character; an event wholly unprecedented in our his-
tory, and which, familiar as we have been with daring
crimes during this conflict, we could not have believed
rebels would dare attempt, has occurred, through
which the nation has been deprived of its leader, and
has been exposed to whatever of confusion or of em-
barrassment successful conspiracy could work. But,
in this new peril to our Government no signs of weak-

ness appear. There is a momentary jar of the superstructure; but the machinery moves on with its wonted regularity and power. The foundations are not moved, the pillars are not fallen—the Republic stands. It has every element of strength, and every provision, under the blessing of God, for its perpetuity. Let us take fresh encouragement from the fearful test which has been applied, that a glorious future awaits our country, and that the great principles which distinguish this nation are destined to enjoy a world-wide triumph.

IV. The mystery which shrouds this afflictive dispensation, should lead us to repose unreserved trust in God.

We cannot fully understand the meaning of this calamity; but we may feel an assurance that God intends it for the nation's good. His hand has appeared in all our past history. From the days of our fathers until now—through all the scenes of the Revolution—through all the privations and sacrifices of that heroic struggle—through all the intervening history of the Union down to the outbreak of the rebellion, the Lord has been with us, and His favor has encompassed us as with a shield. He has not withdrawn His hand from us during the trying scenes of this present bloody drama, but has often interposed in our behalf, and granted deliverance in times of peril. We may safely trust Him in this dark hour. He will not leave us to perish, after that He

has given us so many tokens of good. The principle for which we have contended so persistently through seasons of gloom and disaster, He will not suffer to fail. The sacrifices of treasure and of blood, the blood of patriot-soldiers and patriot-statesmen so freely offered, He will not permit to be wasted. The martyr blood of our revered Chief Magistrate is not shed in vain. God will make clear in His own time, His purpose in this sorrowful event. Let us not murmur nor complain; but let us await with calm resignation the revelations which He shall make of his sovereign will. God is his own interpreter, and He will make it plain.

Brethren and friends, there is sorrow in the Nation's Capital to-day—in the high place of authority—in the house of the Nation's Chief Ruler there is bitter anguish. A family weeps for the loss of a husband—a father cruelly slain. But they weep not alone. The tears of millions fall as rain; for the whole land mourns. The lowly and the exalted—the poor and the rich—the black and the white—the emancipated and the free born—the private citizen and the magistrate—the soldier and the statesman—the old men and the children weep this day, for all have lost a friend. Within a narrow coffin lies the inanimate form of our loved, trusted, and honored President. We shall see his face and form no more. Spirit of the departed! we will ever cherish the remembrance of thee. Thy thoughtful brow—thy face

illumined with intelligence and love—thy form ungainly, but within which lodged a loving, generous, patriotic heart.—the life which thou didst give to thy country—these can never be forgotten. Thy name will stand enrolled among the names of the illustrious of all ages—thy memory will be enshrined in the affections of a grateful people through all time, thy virtues forever fragrant, will prove incentives to the love of truth—to fidelity to duty, and to consecration of life to country and to God—to the youth of all lands.

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